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ABSTRACT

This paper invites views from the heads of publicly funded higher education institutions in the United Kingdom, higher education trade unions, and other bodies with an interest in equal opportunities on a proposal to set up an equal opportunities action group. While the proposal notes that progress has been made in providing equal opportunities for all who work in higher education, several reviews in 1999 by administrative bodies indicate that further improvement is required. The proposed group would be a collaborative venture and would included various representative bodies, existing networks, and initiatives with a mission to support the work of higher education institutions in the UK and provide an overall review of progress. A partnership framework is set out in detail. The cost over a five-year period, covering all of the UK, is estimated at 2.5 million English pounds. Several specific comments are requested. Appendix A sets forth the mission and aims of the partnership group; appendix B shows the organizational structure and roles of the various bodies. (RH)

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ED 445 567

Consultation

May 00/21

Respond by 30 June 2000

Improving equal opportunities for higher education staff

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Improving equal opportunities for higher education staff

To	Heads of publicly-funded higher education institutions in the UK HE sector trade unions Other bodies with an interest in equal opportunities
Of interest to those responsible for	Personnel, Equal opportunities, Human resources
Reference	00/21
Publication date	May 2000
Enquiries to	Fiona Waye, CVCP, tel 020 7419 5483, e-mail Fiona.Waye@cvcp.ac.uk

Executive summary

Purpose

1. This document invites views on a proposal to set up an Equal Opportunities Action Group. The Action Group would support the work of UK higher education institutions in improving equal opportunities for their staff, and provide a sector-level view of progress.

Key points

2. The Equal Opportunities Action Group would be a collaborative venture by the sector's representative bodies, trades unions and existing networks and initiatives, with the support of the UK funding bodies for higher education.

3. If the proposal is accepted, the funding bodies and the representative bodies envisage that it would require an initial investment of approximately £2.5 million over five years.

Action required

4. Please send any comments to Fiona Waye at the CVCP, Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HQ, by 30 June 2000.

Introduction

5. The National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education (NCIHE, 1997) set out four main purposes for higher education, one of which was 'to play a major role in shaping a democratic, civilised, inclusive society'.

6. Providing equal opportunities for all who work in higher education is integral to this aim. This, of course, was recognised long before the NCIHE; indeed, the report praised the progress that the sector had made.

7. However, there is now enough evidence to show that further improvement is required. The NCIHE and the Independent Review of Higher Education Pay and Conditions, chaired by Sir Michael Bett (1999) both drew attention to gender inequalities in higher education. They highlighted the need for higher education institutions (HEIs) to ensure equality of employment opportunities for all staff, to remove barriers which may inhibit recruitment and progression for particular groups, and to implement effective pay and career structures. In addition, the recent report on 'Ethnicity and employment in higher education' (Policy Studies Institute, 1999) found that, although almost all HEIs had equal opportunities policies, only a third had a specific racial equality policy.

8. This consultation document proposes an approach to improving equal opportunities for HE staff. It recognises that the task rests with institutions themselves, and that there is a strong desire to improve. This is a challenge where all stakeholders share a common purpose. Although the issues can be complex, it makes sense to address them in partnership and to do so with consistent long-term commitment.

9. The Commission on University Career Opportunity (CUCO), established in 1994, adopted such an approach and has achieved notable successes, including the publication of extensive good practice guidance specific to HE. Equal opportunity practitioner groups have played a crucial role in moving the sector forward. Our proposal builds on this success, widening the remit, engaging all stakeholders throughout the UK, and strengthening resources.

The proposal

10. We propose to create an Equal Opportunities Action Group to support directly the work of HEIs in the UK and to provide a sector-level view of progress. The Action Group would be resourced with full-time professional staff. A draft mission and aims are at Annex A.

11. Institutions would be supported by good practice guidance, a specific institutional advisory service, and central initiatives such as the Athena Project and the Women's Register.

12. The Athena Project was set up to encourage strategies, promote good practice and offer incentives to improve the access, participation and promotion of women in science, engineering and technology in higher education. The Women in Higher Education Register was established by CVCP and is open to all women working in higher education. The register offers its members an information centre, resources and opportunities for networking, as well as support for career and personal development.

13. The Equal Opportunities Action Group would draw on lessons from other sectors and other countries, identifying practical approaches that can make a difference. Improvements would be measured quantitatively through improved data, and qualitatively through specially commissioned research.

14. We have developed a partnership framework, which is set out in detail at Annex B. This envisages the Equal Opportunities Action Group being steered by a Joint Equality Steering Group (JESG). The JESG would incorporate all major stakeholders and would draw on advice from two advisory groups – one representing trade unions and the other representing practitioners in equal opportunities. For accountability purposes, the JESG would report to the sector representative bodies and the UK HE funding bodies.

15. We envisage that existing CUCO activity would be subsumed within the Equal Opportunities Action Group, with CUCO itself being replaced by the JESG.

Resources

16. If the proposal is accepted, we envisage that approximately £2.5 million over five years would be required to implement it across the UK.

Review

17. The effectiveness of these arrangements would be reviewed after three years, although they would be expected to operate for at least five years.

Consultation

18. We invite stakeholders' views on this proposal. In particular we would like comments on:

a. The proposed approach and whether this would engage stakeholders, command sufficient support and have sufficient status to secure improvement in the sector.

b. The mission and aims of the Equal Opportunities Action Group (Annex A).

c. The proposed roles of each element of the partnership framework (Annex B).

d. Any omissions from the proposal.

19. Please send comments to Fiona Waye at CVCP, Woburn House, Tavistock Square, London WC1H 9HQ by 30 June 2000.

Annex A

Mission and aims of the Equal Opportunities Action Group

Mission

1. To improve equal opportunities for all who work in the UK higher education sector.

Aims

2. To achieve this mission the Equal Opportunities Action Group will:

a. Work with all stakeholders to raise the awareness and profile of equal opportunities.

b. Provide specific advice to institutions to help them secure improvements in equal opportunities.

c. Help specify appropriate data requirements to support equal opportunities monitoring.

d. Monitor performance at a sector level.

e. Directly support HEIs in developing appropriate institutional benchmarks and standards that will help measure progress.

f. Develop and disseminate good practice, looking to experience from within and outside the sector, in this country and abroad.

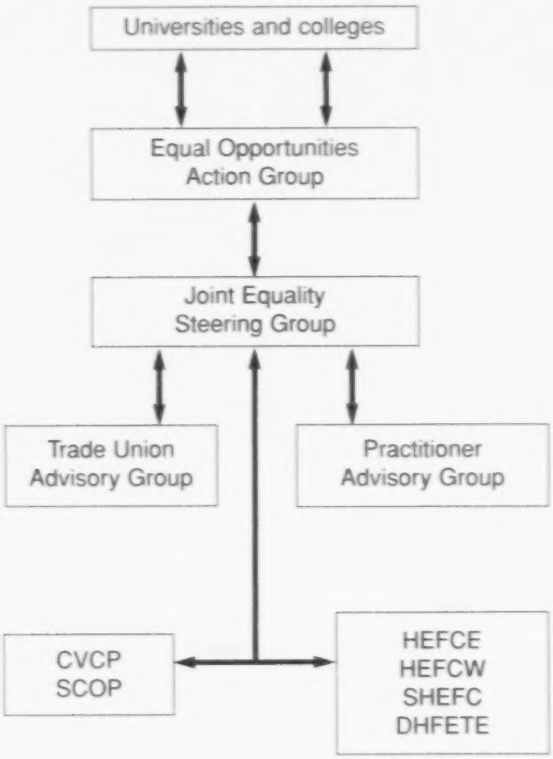
g. Commission research to underpin policy and practice development.

Annex B

Partnership framework for improving equal opportunities

Introduction

1. The proposed partnership framework is shown diagrammatically, followed by a description of the role of each element. More detailed constitutional arrangements are set out in paragraphs 7-17 of this annex.



HEFCE – Higher Education Funding Council for England

HEFCW – Higher Education Funding Council for Wales

SHEFC – Scottish Higher Education Funding Council

DHFETE – Department of Higher and Further Education, Training and Employment (Northern Ireland)

SCOP – Standing Conference of Principals

CVCP – Committee of Vice-Chancellors and Principals

Roles

2. The role of universities and colleges would be to:

a. Actively and visibly support the mission and aims of the Equal Opportunities Action Group.

b. Contribute to developing and implementing good practice.

c. Incorporate outputs of the Equal Opportunities Action Group into institutional policies, procedures and management processes.

d. Provide data to help assess sector-wide progress.

e. Respond to consultations on new initiatives.

f. Provide feedback on the effectiveness of the partnership framework.

3. The Equal Opportunities Action Group would:

a. Work directly with institutions, under the guidance of the JESG, to deliver its mission and aims.

b. Provide draft strategic and operating plans, including annual budgets, to the JESG for approval.

c. Report performance against plans to the JESG, and produce an annual report.

d. Operate and manage schemes designed to achieve its mission and aims, including:

i. The Athena project.

ii. The Women's Register.

iii. Advisory Service.

e. Propose new schemes or major amendments to existing schemes to the JESG for approval.

f. Work in partnership with other groups to achieve the mission and aims, in particular:

i. The race and ethnicity task group.

ii. The disability focus group.

iii. The advisory group for the top management programme.

4. The Joint Equality Strategy Group (JESG) would:

a. Bring together a wide range of stakeholders to work towards delivering the mission and aims within the group's terms of reference.

b. Provide publicly available annual progress reports to the funding and representative bodies.

c. Receive advice from the Trade Union Advisory Group and the Practitioner Advisory Group.

d. Approve the Equal Opportunities Action Group's strategic and operating plans, including annual budgets. These will include detailed implementation plans with actions, milestones, outcomes and timetables clearly identified.

e. Advise the funding bodies and representative bodies of resource requirements.

f. Oversee consultations.

g. Approve new schemes or major amendments to existing schemes proposed by the Equal Opportunities Action Group to achieve its mission and aims.

h. Appoint the Head of the Equal Opportunities Action Group.

5. The representative bodies (CVCP and SCOP) would:

a. Agree terms of reference for the JESG and agree the mission and aims of the Equal Opportunities Action Group.

b. Receive annual reports from the JESG and monitor progress in achieving strategic objectives.

c. Provide a contribution to funding.

d. Provide the legal framework within which the Equal Opportunities Action Group operates.

e. Be responsible for issues relating to the employment and support of Equal Opportunities Action Group staff.

6. The funding bodies (HEFCE, HEFCW, SHEFC and DHFETE) would:

a. Agree terms of reference for the JESG and agree the mission and aims of the Equal Opportunities Action Group.

b. Receive annual reports from the JESG and monitor progress in achieving strategic objectives.

c. Provide a contribution to funding.

Constitutional arrangements

JESG

7. The JESG would consist of a chair and 17 members, including:

a. Three heads of institutions or members of representative bodies, appointed by CVCP (including COSHEP and HHEW) and SCOP.

b. Three funding body nominees appointed by the funding bodies themselves.

c. Three trade union nominees, appointed by the Trade Union Advisory Group.

d. Head of the Equal Opportunities Action Group.

e. Of the remaining seven members, two would be appointed by the Practitioners Advisory Group and one by the UCEA. The remaining members would be co-opted by the group and drawn from governing bodies, specialist advisers, the Universities and Colleges Staff Development Association (UCoSDA), personnel directors, the Higher Education Equal Opportunities Network and members of representative bodies. The JESG may draw on further expertise by invitation to specific meetings.

8. The secretariat would be provided by the Equal Opportunities Action Group, and the Chair would be appointed by the representative bodies, subject to the agreement of the funding bodies and in consultation with the trade unions. The JESG may form sub-groups for specific tasks. The partnership framework allows for the establishment of a management committee to oversee the operation of the Action Group, if the JESG decided that this was appropriate.

9. In nominating and co-opting members to the JESG, account should be taken of the need to have a diversity of members that can properly address equal opportunities issues.

Trade Union Advisory Group

10. This group's role would be to advise the JESG. Its membership would consist of nominees from the 10 nationally recognised unions represented in the HE sector.

11. The group may co-opt any other members. It would appoint its own chair, and appoint three representatives to sit on the JESG. Although the Head of the Equal Opportunities Action Group would not be a member of the group, he or she would be invited to attend some meetings.

Practitioners Advisory Group

12. This group's role would be to advise the JESG. Its membership would be drawn from personnel and equal opportunities specialists.

13. The group may co-opt other members. It would appoint its own chair, and appoint two representatives to sit on the JESG. Although the Head of the Equal Opportunities Action Group would not be a member of the group, he or she would be invited to attend some meetings.

Equal Opportunities Action Group

14. The Equal Opportunities Action Group would work to its mission and aims, as agreed by the representative bodies and funding bodies, and would be overseen by the JESG. Initially it would consist of:

a. A head of the group.

b. One policy adviser.

c. One team administrator.

15. It would also consist of:

a. Part-time director of the Athena project (2 days) supported by part-time administrator (0.5 days) and part-time researcher (2.5 days).

b. Part-time co-ordinator of the Women's Register (1.5 days).

c. Advisory service core adviser.

16. The Head of the Equal Opportunities Action Group would need to establish appropriate frameworks for management reporting. The resource requirements would be reviewed after six months, with the intention of recruiting a second policy adviser.

17. The staff of the Equal Opportunities Action Group would be employed and administered by the CVCP, although they could be located at an institution. The group would have an initial life-span of five years, and its impact would be formally reviewed after three years.

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